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ABSTRACT

Board members and administrators can build public confidence in their schools by taking every opportunity to communicate positive attitudes about the people in the schools. As leaders, they have the responsibility to use people power to promote the schools. If school employees feel good about their jobs, they will build confidence within the community. Board members should make individual commitments about strengths in their organizations and talk about these strengths at board meetings. Finally, they should start and end board meetings on positive notes about people or things that they are proud of in the school district. (MLF)

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STRENGTHENING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

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A paper presented at the NSBA Conference
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Our topic this afternoon is how to strengthen public confidence in your schools. I think it is very important, before we give you a list of what to do and how to do it in each district, that we go back a little bit and understand what we talk about when we speak of public confidence in our local school districts! If we are serious about building public confidence in our schools we must remember that people are more important than things. We've got to take advantage of every opportunity to communicate with the public every time the community members attend a school board meeting, a school function, or a parent conference . That is when we have an opportunity to build greater confidence within our community. We must assure those are positive, reinforceable attitudes when we talk to people within our community. If you, as board members and administrators, in your local community provide the leadership and encourage all employees in your district to be committed to communicate the positive attitudes that you must have within your school district, I guarantee you that you will have a dramatic change in the attitudes within your schools.

Let's look at what we are saying. We have a marvelous opportunity to use the greatest resource that we have in building public confidence - and that is people; because, they are the ones that are providing the programs within your community. You don't have a great English program, you have great teachers in that program. It's not the English program that you want to build confidence in, it is the people that provide that program that you want to talk about, that you want to acknowledge, that

you want to build confidence within the community. It is the people you want to talk about. Just think about all the people that we associate with starting with board members, the superintendent, the principals, the teachers, the secretaries, the bus drivers, the parents, the graduates, the custodians, the food service workers, the classroom aides, all the boosters clubs. They all have reasons to support the schools, and they are supporting the schools. It is our job, as board members and administrators, to provide the leadership within the organization so that people feel good about what they are doing, and they can communicate that to the people they talk to.

You don't hire a Public Relations person and say he/she is going to take care of PR in the community, and we don't have to worry about it as board members. It is our responsibility in every job that we have to provide the confidence and to communicate it, and to use the people power to promote the schools. We have to start with the people!

My task this morning is to challenge each of the board members and administrators within your district to take a serious look at what you believe about your school district. We are here to talk about strengthening public confidence. Do you believe in what you want to sell? If you don't believe it no one else will. As board members, you are where it starts. Before you leave today, I wish you would look back, think, and come up with some individual perceptions about what your school district has. What are the strengths that you have within the community? Remember to emphasize <u>people</u> strengths in your organization. After you

make an individual commitment about what you believe about your public schools, then you as a board member or superintendent need to make a commitment at a board meeting to say, "Yes, we want to promote confidence in our schools because these are the things we do well". "These are the things that we know we can identify, that we are proud of, and we want people to know." You've got to start with positive attitudes at board meetings, at PTA meetings, at the grocery line. It is unfortunate, but as board members, people come up to you and say:

"Aren't you a board member?"
"Yes."
"I've been meaning to call you, I have a problem I'd like to discuss with you."
"There was an incident today at school."
"I need to discuss this with you."

Very often, you start your conversation with a negative attitude. I'd like to challenge you as board members and administrators to try and end that conversation with a positive note. Try to start your board meetings on a positive note. Talk about things that are going well in your school district. Have teachers or students come in to present programs of what is going on, what is happening in the schools. Stress good things. Occasionally you have three hours of a board meeting where everybody is frustrated, fighting, or mad, and somebody said something and you go home and sleep on it. Do something positive before you leave. Talk about something good. Start it and end it on a positive note. Feel good about what you do, because goodness gracious, everyone else talks about you. The only reward you're going to get is to feel good about what you're doing as a board member.

Superintendents and principals are also responsible for positive attitudes with the teachers as well as other members of the community. But they are also responsible to get information to you as a board member so that you can talk positively to people about the programs. It is your responsibility to find out the things you have questions about. If you're not sure about a program, ask. End the conversation with your constituents on a positive note. The lady calls up and there was a problem on the bus and she wants to discuss it with you. Know some things about your district so that you can end on a positive note.

"We traveled a million miles this year without any accidents, without any fatalities."
"We transport X number of kids every day."

"Thank you, I appreciate your concern."

I have a concern. We want to keep up the good job that we've done in transporting students; and feeding students. Have you ever heard anyone say a good thing about a lunch program? Have you? We had an editorial in the high school newspaper written by high school students that said something nice about our cafeteria. I nearly fell off my chair when I read it. It said something nice about the food in the cafeteria. The title of it was "We're Serving Food 'gain in the Cafeteria". Something positive from the kids, and when you have that happen, play it for everything you've got, folks. Talk about it. Talk to other people about it. "Hey, did you hear what the editorial was at the high school?", or the bus drivers' conference, or the cook's conference, or the aides. Every person in the organization must feel good about their job, and they are the ones that will best build

the confidence within your community so that you can be proud of your schools. **SCHOOL SECRETARIES** - usually the first and single best-known person in each of the school buildings. If she doesn't feel good about her job and the things that are going on in that building, what kinds of things is she going to say during the day, after work, or at the grocery line, or wherever she goes during off hours. **THE COOKS** - It is often said the way to one's heart is through the stomach. That goes for children as well as adults. A good lunch program - talk about it. **NUTRITION PROGRAMS** - integrate it within the classroom. **THE CUSTODIANS** - national surveys have told us that the person that people in the community believe more about what goes on in the school is the custodian; Not the board member, not the superintendent, not the teacher, not the children - the custodian. If he or she doesn't feel good and doesn't have the confidence that you have a good program, they're going to communicate that, folks. They're going to communicate it. **BUS DRIVERS** - see children and parents every day. We must make them feel good about their jobs and the school system. Include them because they are a part of the educational program. Last but not least, the best communicators of a positive program are the **CHILDREN**. The kids. They've got to feel good about the program in which they spend 6, 7, 8 hours. I don't want to ignore the other people, but I do want to reiterate some things, and then you can go away and then get the answers from the ladies that will follow me. Make a commitment and search to see what is good in your system. What do you believe in? What's good? What can you prove that's good to your next

door neighbor, to the person down the street? Use people power to strengthen your public confidence. Use the people that work for you. That's the best way to get it. If you can do that, you'll have confidence in your public schools.

Start and end your board meetings on some positive notes. Talk about some good things, talk about some kids, talk about the things that are happening inside the classroom, or on the bus or wherever. Last but not least, I would challenge each of you to make a list of 10 positive statements or people or things that you're proud of in your school system. Each of you can do it. Everyone here can do it. Give it to a fellow board member, and look at the 10 that each of you have and you can come up with, maybe without some duplication, 40 or 50 things that are positive in your school system that you believe in. O.K., if you will do that and the suggestions that the ladies have for other things, I believe without a doubt that you can strengthen your public confidence in each of your community schools and your job will be much more rewarding.